

THE SPIRITUAL ISSUES OF THE WAR

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OBJECTS:

1. To provide for readers at home and abroad information concerning the life and thought of the British Churches in wartime.
2. To elucidate by news and quotations the spiritual issues at stake in the war.

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THE SPIRITUAL OUTLOOK IN HOLLAND

It has become increasingly difficult to obtain first-hand information from occupied Holland. We think, therefore, that our readers will be interested to learn how things are going, and especially to see the following article from a recent paper on "Preaching in Holland To-day."

"In this time of warfare it can be stated that preaching is becoming more intense. The justice and the grace of God are and must be announced more clearly than ever to those who are in the midst of the torment let loose by the judgments of God in history; they can find no strength or consolation except in God. Indeed, we notice that preaching counts for more than before. It is as though the Law and the Gospel took on a more present-day significance for our epoch—both find their place in Dutch preaching.

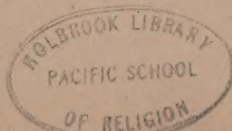
"The teaching element is also more necessary than before in a time of great temptations, and particularly in view of intensive propaganda for anti-Christian doctrines. To avoid this teaching weighing down the sermon unduly, many parishes organise weekly meetings in the course of which up-to-date subjects are studied with as large a group as can be got together.

"In a country where the authorities tend to transgress the commandments of God more and more, witness against injustice is very necessary. Indeed, you hear this witness ringing out now in places where it was not known hitherto. That makes one of the important elements in to-day's preaching. The Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church, like the authorities of other churches, have lifted up their voice when they have thought it necessary.

"Prayer in the Church claims our attention more than ever before. Special prayer

meetings take place and prayer for 'all the needs of Christendom' is made to-day with a seriousness hitherto unknown. Absolute silence reigns in the church when the solemn prayer is said for the authorities: 'for our legitimate government, our honoured Queen and her government abroad, for the authorities in power whom in Thy inscrutable counsel Thou dost permit to govern us, that their government may be exercised according to Thy commandments and we may lead a peaceable life, without fear and without hate.'

"Without the discipline of a sound exegesis of the Bible all kinds of strange doctrines slip into the sermons. We notice it in the first place among those few clergy who have allowed themselves to be won by the new order and the new ideology. The fact that they succeed in introducing into their sermons all kinds of theories about race, blood and soil, can only explain itself through the complete absence of exegetical learning. But we also see many other clergy who in the pulpit make themselves the bearers of national statements in the opposite direction. This temptation is very great in our occupied country, for the national feelings of every good Dutchman, whether he is a pastor or a church member, are very strong. Further, the natural national aversion towards 'the foreigner' coincides with a proper Christian rejection of strange doctrines. And confusion is even easier as Holland has been thought of for a long time as a Christian country where the Church has grown from deep roots in the national life. Thus we are continually tempted to see Holland as the land of Canaan. Again, people commit the fatal error of applying the texts of the Old Testament, which speak of Israel as the elect nation, not only to the Church but also to the Netherlands. So an



enemy of Israel becomes the present-day enemy of the Dutch nation. This erroneous identification gives a pharisaical character to sermons. And just because the history of the country allows us to fall into this error so easily it is all the more necessary to fight it by a true exegesis. But these difficulties cannot become a reason for abstaining from applying the Word of God to the present situation. Above all, in our day, when great areas of the nation are alienated from the Church, it is more urgent than ever to proclaim and to put into practice the commandments of God, in order to show that the Church is not an enemy, nor a mere spectator, but a courageous ally."

A number of further items of information concerning Church life in Holland have recently reached us. Most of them reveal a situation of tension and difficulty in the relations between the Church and the Nazi-controlled State authorities.

The Dutch Bible Society has discontinued its activities by order of the occupying authorities. During 1941 this Society, which represented all churches, printed and circulated 160,000 Bibles.

One hundred pastors of the Dutch Reformed Church have been arrested by the German authorities since the German invasion of Holland. Seven of them have died in concentration camps.

The Dutch paper *De Standaard* reports: "There are not enough pastors left at liberty for the congregations in Holland. Of the eight churches of the Dutch Reformed Church in Groningen only three have pastors."

A Synod of the Reformed Church was held at the end of November at Utrecht. Several vestry councils expressed their doubt as to the legality of the decisions made there, some stating that they would appeal to the following Synod to decide whether or not the decisions of this Synod were legal.

De Standaard for November 26th stated that the general committee would not be able to give public reports on its deliberations. Everything was done in secret committee, but all those who were really interested in the deliberations would receive news by those methods "which it is now commonly necessary to employ." The Synod was absolutely united in its determination to find solutions for all the difficult questions which occupy the Church at the present time.

Church Unity

Under the strain of present difficulties movements towards Church unity are gathering

strength. In Apeldoorn 40 pastors and lay members of the Protestant churches have formed a committee aiming at greater Christian unity. The movement has created some reaction, for the churches of Haarlem have issued a statement laying down the conditions which must be fulfilled before local churches take part in conferences on this subject.

It would appear that the churches have been compelled to modify the stand they have previously taken up in connection with the Labour Camps. It is reported that the Roman Catholic Episcopate has issued directions to the clergy stating that the ban which prevented Roman Catholic young people from entering the camps has been removed. This step has been taken partly because of the conscription which leaves youth little choice in the matter, but also because camp chaplains are to be appointed to carry on spiritual welfare work in the camps. The Protestant Church Synod has stated that in view of the conscription now introduced everyone must decide, according to his own conscience, whether or not he will refuse or obey. Protestant Christian circles are giving their attention to spiritual welfare in the 54 camps, about which further information is expected to be published in the Dutch press.

A Roman Catholic priest, aged 32, was sentenced to imprisonment by an Arnhem magistrate on January 7th for holding "unauthorised public collections of goods and money." He explained that the collections were for Roman Catholics who, according to Church rules, were not allowed to be members of the "Dutch Labour Front." Former members of the Roman Catholic Workers' Union had contributed to these collections. "So, you always obey the Bishop's orders even when they are opposed to State law?" said the judge. "Yes," replied the defendant. The priest stated that he was willing to be imprisoned himself but he hoped that another punishment would be given to the workers who had families and could not be spared. They were subsequently fined, but the chaplain was imprisoned for two months "because he had interfered with State affairs in a manner which incited the population."

A NEW STAGE IN GERMAN RESISTANCE TO HITLERISM?

During the war a number of statements by Christian leaders in Germany have appeared criticising the Nazi regime from one point of view or another. It has often been noted that most of these critical statements confined their attention to the internal policy

of the Nazi Government, and no explicit criticism of the foreign policy of the Nazis by Church leaders has reached this country.

A Christmas Pastoral Letter by Count von Preysing, Roman Catholic Bishop of Berlin, dated December 12th, 1942, consists of an eloquent treatment of the foundations of justice. Certain sections of this letter make it clear that justice can never be interpreted purely in national terms. There is thus an implied, even if only an implied, criticism of the Nazi attitude to other peoples and lands in this very important document.

The Foundations of Justice

"Justice is essentially a quality based upon eternal foundations. It does not depend upon the arbitrary actions of mankind. Justice is that instinct that derives from the immutable laws which God has placed in the hearts of mankind to form the basis of society. One of its principles is 'Do as you would be done by.' Another such principle is that the life of the innocent individual, be it an unborn child or old person, is sacred and that the innocent may not be punished with, or in place of, the guilty. To take the life of a man is only permitted to the authorities as a punishment for crime, in defence of one's country or in lawful self-defence. Justice is not an arbitrary creation of mankind. Justice is not derived from the will of the society, even though systems of justice have been differently developed within various nations. Right cannot be determined by the criterion of whether it is useful or otherwise. The rights of the individual as those of the society are limited by eternal justice. The individual cannot impose his own rule against this eternal right; neither can the society do so; even the community is obliged to observe those rights whose principles are graven in the heart of every man. There is an eternal right outside man's will and guaranteed by God. There is a clear and distinct division between good and evil and between things which are permitted and those which are not. The denial of the existence of objective right results from a non-recognition of the absolute sovereign power of God. If the foundations of right are not based outside and above the individual or nation, or even outside and above all mankind, then principles of right may change according to man's will, according to time and place and the quality of the individual or nation; the notion, thereby, of right ceases to exist. Right is something which must be enforced even

against the interest of the individual and nation. The rights of mankind must be based on the sovereign right of God; its striving for right must be built on the basic principles of justice with which God has endowed human nature. . . .

"Since no principles concerned with rights can be of temporary duration, and cannot be a quintessence of racial peculiarities, rights and the application and use of such rights cannot be the privilege of a single nation. Every human being enjoys privileges of which no worldly power can deprive him. It is an honourable page in the history of mankind that rights have been progressively developed and that they are defined and established by the laws of nations. No primeval rights enjoyed by mankind, namely, the right to live and to exist, to have freedom of choice and to contract marriage (the existence of which does not depend upon the arbitrary dicta of governments), may be taken from anyone merely because he is not of our blood or does not speak our language.

Attack on Rosenberg?

"A certain German philosopher who has been guiding the minds of a great many people has exerted a harmful influence over the German nation by proclaiming that as far as specially endowed individuals and highly gifted nations are concerned there can be no good or evil, no right or wrong, and that these are dispensed from respecting any questions of right or morality; that it is their privilege to deprive weaker nations or peoples of lower cultural level than themselves, or races which really or seemingly do not enjoy as many advantages, of every right. And it is intimately connected with this terrible creed that this philosopher, unlike others, denies God's existence and incidentally that of universally acknowledged rights.

"My dear Brethren: I must seriously warn you against such theories, especially in wartime, when might confronts might, when power seems to be supreme and we are in danger of despising justice; yet only by acknowledging and respecting right can we hope for a better future for everyone and a just peace for all. Let us examine ourselves and see how far the idea of eternal immutable right lives within us and how strongly we are convinced that certain primeval rights may not be denied to any man, regardless of his origin. We must be perfectly clear that the lack of such rights or even the violation

of the rights of our fellow-men is an injustice towards other nations as well as against our own nation. 'It is the curse of an evil deed that it must continue conceiving more evil.' This saying was never more true than it is in this case.

"My dear Brethren: 'Repent' and change your mode of thinking. This is my appeal to you. No single erroneous theory which the world adopts ever fails to influence even faithful children of the Church and those who would be true disciples of Christ. Let us cling to the faith that these rights protect everyone who is innocent of personal wrongdoing. Let us, furthermore, cling to the faith that these rights are universal and applicable to us all. We do not want to claim for ourselves things to which we are not entitled; neither do we wish to renounce anything to which we may be entitled. We wish to cultivate a spirit of justice and fairness. Let us always remember that by respecting the rights of others we acknowledge and profess God's sovereign rule."

TWO FURTHER MESSAGES FROM THE AMERICAN CHURCHES

At the great meeting of the Federal Council of Churches of America, held in December 1942, to which reference was made in a recent bulletin, two statements in addition to those already reported will be of interest to our readers.

Anti-Semitism

The following statement on anti-Semitism was adopted by the Conference:—

"The reports which are reaching us concerning the incredible cruelties toward the Jews in Nazi occupied countries, particularly Poland, stir the Christian people of America to the deepest sympathy and indignation. It is impossible to avoid a conclusion that something like a policy of deliberate extermination of the Jews in Europe is being carried out. The violence and inhumanity which Nazi leaders have publicly avowed toward all Jews are apparently now coming to a climax in a virtual massacre. We are resolved to do our full part in establishing conditions in which such treatment of the Jews shall end.

"The feelings of the Jewish community throughout the world have recently been expressed in a period of mourning, fasting and prayer. We associate ourselves with our Jewish fellow-citizens in their hour of tragic sorrow, and unite our prayers with theirs.

"We confess our own ineffectiveness in combating the influences which beget anti-Semitism in our own country, and urge our constituencies to intensify their efforts in behalf of friendly relations with the Jews.

"We urge that all plans for reconstruction in Europe shall include measures designed to secure full justice for the Jews and a safe and respected place for them in western civilisation. For those who, after the war, will have to emigrate from the war-ridden lands of Europe, immigration opportunities should be created in this and other lands.

"We recommend that the officers of the Federal Council transmit this action to the Jewish leaders in person."

Christians of Other Lands

The following message was addressed to Christians of other lands, clearly with a special reference to those in occupied Europe:—

"Across all the divisions of nation and race our thoughts go out to you as members, with us, of the universal fellowship of the Christian Church which God has created by His Holy Spirit. We rejoice that it is a fellowship which neither distance, nor language, nor colour, nor political loyalty, nor war can destroy. In spite of all the cleavages that sunder men to-day, our fellowship in Christ remains unbroken. We declare our unity with you in every land who witness to the Word of God and hold fast to the Christian faith.

"Many of you, living under the Cross, steadfast under hardship and persecution, have inspired us to greater faith and courage. What St. Paul wrote from prison to the Philippians is true of many of our harassed fellow-Christians to-day—because of their bonds we 'are more abundantly bold to speak the word of God without fear; the things which have happened to them 'have fallen out unto the furtherance of the Gospel.' (Phil. 1:14, 12.)

"We pledge to our fellow-Christians everywhere an unceasing comradeship in prayer, beseeching our common Father that He will vouchsafe His light and comfort to those in affliction and His strength to those under the burden of grievous trial. We pledge ourselves also to a comradeship in service for the healing of the nations, rededicating ourselves to Him in Whom alone is the way of peace and reconciliation."

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